



THE NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Reviewing Stand

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A radio discussion over WGN and the Mutual Broadcasting System

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What Does Alaska Mean to Us?

MR. McBURNEY: What does Alaska mean to us?

GENERAL WHITNEY: Alaska is of great strategic importance to the defense of the United States.

MR. JACKSON: The development of the territory means an opportunity for capital investment.

MR. YOUNG: Alaska means an incorporated territory of the United States, having a very large area and a very small population which some people think should become the forty-ninth state.

MR. PROUDFOOT: Alaska is rich in minerals, fish, furs, timber and has beautiful scenery.

'Alaska Unknown'

MR. McBURNEY: Gentlemen, I think that most Americans have a pretty vague, often naive, conception of what Alaska is all about. What is it like, Proudfoot? What kind of territory are we talking about?

MR. PROUDFOOT: Alaska is a very large country, a very large area, 586,000 square miles. It lies very much north of us, anywhere from 1,500 to 3,000 miles north and northwest of us here. This large area, if laid on the United States, would practically go from one end of it to the other, because you have the Aleutian fringe of islands. It is relatively unpopulated. There are nearly five square miles for every person up there. Actually, of course, most of the sum of 150,000 people living in Alaska are concentrated in a relatively few places, mainly in cities.

MR. McBURNEY: How does that 150,000 population compare with other states, smaller states? I take it the comparison might be made with Nevada. Do you know offhand what the population of Nevada is?

MR. PROUDFOOT: I don't know offhand. This is a relatively small population group in Alaska, but not so small that it isn't larger than the

populations in a number of territories which were admitted to statehood. This is not a specialty of mine, however.

MR. YOUNG: I was going to comment on that. The population of Alaska in the 1950 census is something like 128,000. However, all of this is not permanent population. We also have to account for something like 34,000 natives. As far as statehood is concerned, there is the question of how large a territory should be.

Native Population

MR. McBURNEY: Under what conditions do the natives live up there, Young?

MR. YOUNG: We have, in general, Dean McBurney, three kinds of natives — the Indians, the Aleuts and the Eskimos. The Indians live in southeast Alaska, the Aleuts in the Aleutian Islands, and the Pribilofs and the Eskimos in the north and northwest. Many of them are adopting modern ideas, modern living conditions, but a few, especially the Eskimos, still retain their tribal traditions. Incidentally, many of the natives are, in essence, wards of the federal government. They go to federal schools which are operated by the Bureau of Indian affairs in the Department of Interior.

MR. McBURNEY: I was going to ask you, Proudfoot, about the industries in Alaska.

MR. PROUDFOOT: There isn't much in the way of industry. There is a great deal in the way of mining, and of course, there is a substantial amount in the way of fishing and fish canning — canning of fish products. Also, the timber industry is important. But these are very primary types of industries. They are not manufacturing in the sense we usually think of manufacturing.

MR. McBURNEY: Do they do much in agriculture?

MR. PROUDFOOT: Agriculture is really on a very limited basis.

MR. McBURNEY: I was thinking particularly of this Matanuska Valley Colony that was developed up there some twenty years ago. I remember they enlisted persons on marginal lands in upper Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, and encouraged them to go up there and settle in this Matanuska Valley. What has happened to that project?

Matanuska Valley Colony

MR. PROUDFOOT: This Matanuska Valley is one of the few pockets, few spots, in Alaska where suitable conditions prevail for agriculture. It is not a big area. It's only a little valley in which this Matanuska Valley Colony developed about 450 square miles. Before the actual federal relief colony was established, there were already about 500 people carrying on some agriculture in the area. Today there are about 3,000 people in this Matanuska Valley. They turn out potatoes and various hardy vegetables, and they go in for dairy cattle to supply milk to Anchorage and various other towns. There is a real need, of course, for various kinds of fresh vegetables and milk, and that is the sort of thing which this Matanuska Valley Colony supplies. However, it was a rather costly proposition if one may say so. It cost the federal government five million four hundred thousand dollars over a period of about twenty years in this area. Although we have the three thousand people there and they have developed the area, one must look at it as a fairly expensive proposition. For example, it cost a total of \$200 an acre just to clean the trees, the brush, and rubbish off the land with bulldozers. We have a lot of good land in this country you can buy for less than \$200 an acre which you don't have to work at that way.

MR. YOUNG: I think we might mention, also, the general inaccessibility of Alaska, especially until recent years. That is, until recent years it was accessible primarily by water. Now, of course, you can get there by air, and in 1942 the Alaskan highway was built, primarily as a military

venture, it is true, but still, it is possible to get to Alaska by overland route. This has had some effect surely upon the development, the relatively slow development. I think the point is, with increased transportation facilities, it might be possible to develop Alaska at a much more rapid pace than has happened up to now.

MR. McBURNEY: Jackson, are there any industries of any size in Alaska now?

Industry

MR. JACKSON: Yes, there are several very substantial investments there on the part of such companies as Libby-McNeill & Libby. Fishing, you know, is the largest industry in the territory. Mining comes second and such companies as United States Smelting, Refining and Mining Company have made substantial investments in mining operations near Fairbanks. Other industries, such as communications and transportation, of course, have developed with the growing population. Presently, the American Viscose Corporation and Puget Sound Pulp and Timber Company are erecting a pulp mill.

MR. PROUDFOOT: What most people don't realize is how very much money citizens of the United States have made on Alaska. It is estimated that the total take out of the area comes pretty close to three billion dollars since we got it in 1867, and we paid a little over seven million dollars for it in those early days. Actually, we got the whole area for about two cents an acre. Of course, some people will say that some of the land is hardly worth two cents an acre. Actually, it has been a very profitable area, indeed, but on a large scale exploitation basis, exploitation of minerals, fish, furs, timber.

MR. McBURNEY: Do we really know how wealthy Alaska is in mineral resources? Maybe it's worth more than two cents an acre! [Laughter]

MR. PROUDFOOT: That is one of the points I wanted very much to make, McBurney. We now have the airplane, and with the airplane the exploration of distant, inaccessible areas is much easier than it ever was be-

fore. The time is ripe, it seems to me, for a very thorough exploration of the resources of Alaska, especially the mineral resources. I don't doubt a good deal of this is being done. All I can say is, in view of the mineral wealth which Alaska has poured out in the past, it seems to me it would be a very good investment to spend more money finding out what we have in Alaska by exploration.

GENERAL WHITNEY: The shortest air routes between the great world powers are across the Arctic, and Alaska affords us fine bases in the Arctic. The military air transport service and commercial air services from our West Coast to Japan go by way of Alaska for the shortest route. The great circle route by way of Anchorage, Aleutians, to Tokyo, is only 5,688 miles, compared with the central route to Hawaii and Wake Island at 6,772 miles, and the southern route by way of Hawaii, Kwajalein, Guam to Tokyo, of 8,083 miles.

Strategic Value

MR. PROUDFOOT: General, what you say about the excellence of the route to Japan and to the Orient by way of Alaska, the great circle route, is absolutely true, but under the present circumstances we have a different alignment. What would you say is the strategic alignment now with regard to Alaska? Surely the situation has changed from World War II. At that time we were very interested in Alaska in terms of defense against Japan. The situation today surely isn't similar to that.

GENERAL WHITNEY: Alaska is of great strategic value to the United States, probably greater defensively than offensively. It is valuable for the detection and possible interception of air attack from eastern Siberia launched against the United States or Canada. It is valuable in defense against air-borne or submarine landings in Alaska or other near Arctic areas. It is valuable as a training base for arctic warfare for the Army, Navy and Air Force, and it is valuable as a base for polar and arctic weather observation and research.

MR. PROUDFOOT: All those things

you say are absolutely true, General. One thing I certainly would stress is the training that one gets in terms of fighting in cold climates. One should stress the fact that the climate of Alaska is rather unique. We have a coastal fringe starting in the panhandle and running all the way along the coast, out in the Aleutians, which is relatively mild, rather a good climate. In other words, it is pretty much the same climate that Western Europe has, but behind the mountain ranges and in the interior of Alaska, we have conditions which are very comparable to Siberia with temperatures down to 75 degrees below zero, and peculiarly and also like Siberia, summer temperatures up in the nineties.

Varying Climates

MR. McBURNEY: What is the average temperature there anyway?

MR. PROUDFOOT: The fluctuations are so great that the average temperature doesn't mean anything. It's really the variation between. You have a range, you see, from 75 below to 90 above. In other words, you have about an 180-degree range from the coldest to the warmest. It's quite something to get used to.

MR. JACKSON: It is pretty difficult to describe the climate of a territory as large as Alaska. The characteristics of the climate in Fairbanks, for instance, are entirely different from those in Juneau.

MR. McBURNEY: You are suggesting that Fairbanks isn't too bad a place to live, Mr. Jackson?

MR. JACKSON: When I was there it was daylight twenty-four hours and 90 above. I haven't been there in the winter.

MR. YOUNG: How cold does it get then?

MR. JACKSON: I understand it gets down to 60 to 65 below.

MR. McBURNEY: What kind of a city is Fairbanks, to take that as an example? How primitive are the conditions there?

MR. JACKSON: They aren't primitive at all. They have parking meters,

modern hotels, air-conditioned restaurants.

MR. PROUDFOOT: Do they have much parking in the wintertime up there outdoors? I am just curious. [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: I doubt it. I haven't been there in the wintertime, but I thought perhaps you might be interested to know that it is really something like a typical western mining town. It reminds me, for instance, of a town like Salida, Colorado.

MR. McBURNEY: We were talking, General Whitney, about the military significance of Alaska, and I understand you to say that it is important primarily for defensive reasons.

'Important in Defense'

GENERAL WHITNEY: I think that is true, Dean McBurney. Alaska offensively may not have great value in a war with Russia, but in the hands of Russia, it would be a very dangerous thing for us because it would provide bases for offensive air operation against strategic targets in the United States and Canada. Incidentally, it is only 1500 miles from Fairbanks to Seattle, 1375 miles from Anchorage to Vancouver and 2900 miles from Fairbanks to Chicago. We must deny the Alaska bases and ports to an enemy!

MR. PROUDFOOT: As far as I am concerned, you are absolutely right. I suppose that is part of the reason for wanting to have some local population up there, to grow some vegetables for the military establishment. Do they import their food or do they expect the local farmers to grow it for them, General?

GENERAL WHITNEY: The supply of the forces — Army, Navy and Air Force — is generally from the United States, and the local purchase would supplement the rations, but I doubt if it would be of too great importance.

MR. YOUNG: There has been a good deal of talk since the war, General Whitney, about developing Alaska in order to protect it for the United States, increasing the population and so on; also, that we should give Alaska its statehood partly for defen-

sive reasons. Do you think there is anything to the argument that we should attempt to develop Alaska in order that we can defend it better?

GENERAL WHITNEY: It might be helpful to the military to have some better development in Alaska, but actually from the standpoint of defense, large populations create problems in the defense of any area, and it would seem that if there were large cities, large populations that had to be cared for by the military, it would add to the problem of defending the country.

MR. JACKSON: The population of Alaska has increased about 75 per cent, I understand, since 1940. This growth in population has led to such commercial developments as newspapers, radio stations, and so forth. One of the big problems, however, in the territory is housing, and the development of the territory economically in ways which would provide such building materials as cement, brick and others, would be very helpful to the territory at this time.

Statehood

MR. McBURNEY: Young has introduced this question of statehood in relation to the military importance of Alaska. How do you view this Alaskan request for statehood, Young?

MR. YOUNG: Dean McBurney, I can give you a little summary here of what has happened, and I might mention that last month, on the 27th of February, the Senate recommitted to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs a bill to give Alaska statehood.

MR. McBURNEY: Does that commitment mean that the issue is dead?

MR. YOUNG: No, it doesn't mean that for all time. It surely means, I think, that it is dead for this present session of Congress.

MR. McBURNEY: What was the vote on it, by the way?

MR. YOUNG: The vote was — let me see — 45 to 44, and incidentally, you might be interested in looking at the general breakdown of votes on that.

MR. McBURNEY: 45 to 44.

MR. YOUNG: We find so far as the

Senate is concerned, there is a pretty even split between the parties. Twenty-three Democrats and twenty-two Republicans voted to send the bill back to the committee. Some twenty-four Democrats and twenty Republicans voted against sending it back to committee. We can say in general that those who voted to send it back are inclined against statehood, and those who voted against sending it back are more or less favorable to statehood.

MR. PROUDFOOT: Of course, statehood for Alaska is not just something by itself. I suppose there is a great deal else involved. If you give statehood to Alaska, what else would be involved? I suppose the Hawaiian Islands. . . .

'Complicated Situation'

MR. YOUNG: Let me take that point up in one second, but I do think there is the political situation in Washington which has to be considered also. You have in part the balance of power in the Senate. You have the general attitude of the American public toward statehood, and then you have the various indigenous movements in say Alaska and Hawaii toward statehood. So far as Washington is concerned, the politicians are quite interested because of the balance of power, who would get more power. You would think, for that reason, the Democrats would be more in favor of bringing Alaska into the Union. That is, on the whole, true, so far as the Northern Democrats are concerned. Incidentally, in this breakdown of votes, we find that the Democrats are split almost in half between the Northern Democrats and the Southern Democrats. There are only three Southern Democrats, Kefauver, Holland and Sparkman who voted against recommitting the bill, and so far as voting to recommit the bill, all of the Democrats were Southerners except one — Senator Hayden of Arizona. So the Democrats are split on this partly for the reason that the Southern Democrats probably do not want to bring in more Senators who might vote for Civil Liberties legislation.

MR. McBURNEY: Did you have

something to say on that, Jackson?

MR. JACKSON: I find there is divided opinion in the territory itself. Those who favor statehood feel that it would give them such advantages as a representation in Congress with a vote. Their delegate now, you know, is merely a Representative. He has no vote in Congress. Those who feel that it would be a disadvantage feel that it would impose tax burdens they couldn't bear or would prefer not to bear.

MR. PROUDFOOT: Would they get any financial advantages out of being a state? Are there certain federal disbursements which Alaska isn't getting today which Alaska would immediately get for roads and things of that character?

'Advantages Questionable'

MR. YOUNG: The answer in general is no. We find that Alaska as a territory is in a very privileged position. It is incorporated territory, and the people who live there have all the rights of citizens of the United States including, incidentally, the right to pay a federal income tax. So far as statehood is concerned, it would mean that Alaska would take over many of the functions — or at least some of the functions — which are carried on by the Department of Interior now. There has been no complete breakdown of functions that would be given to Alaska, but on the whole, it would cost Alaska more to operate as a state than as a territory.

MR. PROUDFOOT: And the people in Alaska themselves seem to be substantially divided, as you pointed out earlier, so there is division both on the outside, within Congress, and within Alaska itself. What are the strong interests that want statehood, Jackson, do you know? In your visit to Alaska were you made aware of who it was that was really back of the statehood idea?

MR. JACKSON: I don't know of any sponsorship by any particular group. I think it is somewhat a matter of personal opinion and a question as to the economic advantage or disadvantage of statehood.

MR. McBURNEY: Don't you think it is in part a matter of personal pride? Don't you think there is a considerable group up there that want statehood for the sake of statehood? Might that not be a factor?

MR. PROUDFOOT: I suppose that might be a factor. There is no question about our obligation with regard to the people who are in Alaska. They are not really completely disenfranchised. I have the impression that many of them live in the South a good bit of the time. Am I right in that? Is the population really a permanent one in Alaska?

'Opinion Divided'

MR. YOUNG: The wealth, I am afraid, Proudfoot, isn't quite so great that everybody can go South for the winter. However, the size of the territory is one of the factors. So far as the population is concerned, I should say that Alaska is somewhat over-represented in the House, even though the delegate doesn't get to vote. Alaska has something less than one-half the size of an ordinary Congressional district. On the other hand, we find that it is a very large area, and a developing area, and they would get more power, surely, in the Senate than any territory of comparable population now has. So far as the people in Alaska are concerned, there was a referendum held in 1946 which showed that some 9,630 Alaskans favored statehood, not necessarily statehood now, but favored it some time, as opposed to 6,822 who were against statehood.

MR. PROUDFOOT: That adds up to about 15,000 people. What is that? Apparently about 40 per cent that might have cast a vote on the subject did so. The others were indifferent, I suppose?

MR. YOUNG: This question of how many people can vote is a difficult one to answer, in part because of the native population. A good many of the native population do vote. There has been an attempt to encourage their voting, to establish polling booths and so on in the native areas, but the actual percentage of natives who vote is not known at the present time. So

we can't say how many people are eligible to vote, although the population is, of course, increasing slightly.

GENERAL WHITNEY: Regardless of statehood, Alaska would have to be defended in any case. The citizens of Alaska are American citizens, and we must defend it for its strategic value. That offers a number of difficult logistical problems. Radar is limited because of the mountainous terrain and atmospheric conditions. The logistical problems, although enormous, are not insurmountable. Communications are difficult because of Northern Lights and other natural disturbances. The transportation is serious. The railroads are few. Roads are poor. Aircraft maintenance is hampered by lack of hangars. Those we do have require outdoor repair during the severe weather. Vehicle maintenance and operation are special problems.

MR. McBURNEY: But I take it these are difficulties we have to face, and we need to meet, General. Is that right?

GENERAL WHITNEY: These are difficulties which we have to face and we are attempting to learn how to face them and make the most of the climatic conditions there.

Geological Survey

MR. JACKSON: In view of the importance of this question, would this not be the time to sponsor a rather complete geological survey of the territory?

MR. PROUDFOOT: I don't know how far they have gone with the exploration, but I know there must be a great deal that remains to be done, and I can think of no better time than just now. From now on, because we have the airplane, we can make on-the-ground exploration in inaccessible areas to which we were absolutely unable to go before. We can land on rivers and small lakes with small aircraft, and in one way and another get into the most inaccessible portions of this huge area known as Alaska with relative ease. It will be done at a high cost, of course, but I think it is worth it in view of the mineral resources we have uncovered there in the past.

MR. YOUNG: It seemed to me, reading the debates in Congress on statehood for Alaska, that one of the reasons the bill was sent back to committee was that the Senators didn't feel they knew enough about policy toward Alaska, what they should do toward Alaska, or what Alaska might be like in the future, in ten years or twenty years. They didn't have adequate material regarding mineral surveys, population development and so on. There is a general feeling that Alaska would develop a feeling of pride in the frontier, and so on, but there is no real knowledge even of how much it would cost Alaska to take on the burden of statehood. I think we can say our policy toward Alaska is unclear at the present time, partly because we are unclear ourselves about what potential resources there are there and what statehood would actually mean.

'Make the Most of It'

MR. PROUDFOOT: We operate on a free enterprise basis in this country, I am glad to say, and as far as I am concerned we ought to look upon Alaska as an area which we exploit if it is to our profit to exploit. I mean by that we should make the most we can out of it. In view of the disagreeable climate of much of the area and the great difficulties of carrying on agriculture, it ought to be exploited during the better summer months by airplane and by other means we have at our command.

MR. McBURNEY: Now, Proudfoot, isn't that position a bit crass? Are you suggesting that we continue to exploit this vast territory economically and then fly to Miami for a warm winter? Is that about what you are saying?

MR. PROUDFOOT: We might have all kinds of gold, Dean McBurney, in our cold attic, but there is no reason why we have to sleep with it. As far as I am concerned, the resources of Alaska are ours to exploit. It is territory of the United States, and I think we are fools if we don't find out how much we have in that attic, but as to living in it all the year around, well, we would have to do a lot of work to

make it comfortable. That's the problem.

Political Development

MR. YOUNG: There is, I think, Proudfoot, relationship between economic exploitation and political development. The premise is if you develop an area with a stable community, people who take pride in their country, they will be willing to invest money there. On the whole, there is a very close relationship between economic development and political development. It isn't a question of going in and exploiting Alaska and not living there, but to exploit it at all, we have to have people who are willing to spend their lives there winter and summer.

MR. PROUDFOOT: The Homestead Act applies to Alaska. As many people as want to can go up there and get their 640 acres, or whatever it is, and start farming. The point is, there are very limited areas that are suitable for farming purposes. It is, however, estimated that about five million people could live and subsist on the basis of agriculture which they could develop in this area, and of course, that is a very large figure compared to the 150,000 that are up there now, but at a cost—a high cost!

MR. JACKSON: The population would grow, I think, in direct proportion to the investment up there by important corporations based on their own research, the type of investment that creates pay roll and brings people to the territory.

MR. McBURNEY: And would you suggest an industrial expansion of that sort? Would a more adequate banking facility help at all, Jackson?

MR. JACKSON: Banking facilities would help materially. There are good banks in Alaska. The borrowing rate is high. It costs 8 per cent to borrow money. For that reason many of the leading companies in the territory bank in Seattle.

MR. PROUDFOOT: Yes, but the point is that banks want to make money, and they want to loan their money on something they can get a return on,

and that certainly wouldn't be agriculture. It seems to me that since we have this military commitment in Alaska which we must keep up for defensive purposes, what we need is a large scale exploratory operation, cooperation between the Army and the various other branches of the military service, and such an outfit as the Geological Survey to find out what we have in the way of mineral wealth and value in Alaska. I say again that on the basis of what we have already

taken out of the area, it looks as if it will be worth doing.

MR. McBURNEY: We seem to be agreed on that one constructive suggestion, certainly, that a substantial survey of this great territory be made, a geological survey, so that we have a better picture of what the potential resources of the area are. With that picture before us, we would be in a position to make firmer judgments on some of these other issues.

ANNOUNCER: I am sorry to interrupt, but our time is up.

Suggested Reading

Compiled by William Huff,
and M. Helen Perkins, Reference Department,
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A basic history of Alaska.

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CARLSON, LELAND H. *An Alaskan Gold Mine; the Story of No. 9 Above*. Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press, 1951. (Northwestern University Studies. Social Science Series, No. 7.)

A history of the gold rush Seward Peninsula.

Congressional Digest 29:271-288, Nov., '50. "Case History-Alaska," "Statehood in the 81st Congress," "Transition from Territory to State," "Statehood Now for Hawaii and Alaska?"

These articles give a brief history of the purchase of Alaska, federal legislation concerning the Territory, and the pros and cons of statehood.

New York Times Magazine p. 30-1, June 12, '49. "Black Gold in the Arctic." H. W. BALDWIN.

"At Point Barrow, the Navy explores its huge Naval Petroleum Reserve No. 4, which could play a large part in Alaska's economy once the tremendous difficulties involved are overcome."

Pacific Historical Review 15:259-278, Sept., '46. "The Discovery of Gold at Nome, Alaska." 16:163-175, May, '47. "The First Mining Season at Nome, Alaska—1899." L. H. CARLSON.

Interesting, well-documented articles on the history of the gold stampede.

Scientific Monthly 73:245-54, Oct., '51. "Agricultural Developments in Interior Alaska." E. W. MILLER.

The Chief of the Division of Geography at Pennsylvania State College discusses environmental factors, the clearing of land, possible crops and livestock of the Tanana Valley-Fairbanks area of Alaska.

Scientific Monthly 73:276-86, Dec., '51. "Political Ecology of Alaska." E. GRUENING.

Alaska's political and economic history, including her present problems, reviewed by the former Governor of the Territory.

Time 56:28-9, Nov. 6, '50. "Alaska: Airman's Theatre."

As a result of a look at Alaska through airmen's eyes it's defense line has been pulled in from a far-flung system of island and coastal bases to the "heartland," centering around ice-free ports, the Alaska Railroad and the Alcan Highway.

U. S. Bureau of Land Management. *Alaskan Group Settlement; the Matanuska Valley Colony*. K. H. STONE. Washington, D. C., Gov't Printing Office, 1950.

A study of the political and economic geography of the Matanuska Valley as an example of a resettlement project.

U. S. Dept. of the Interior. Territories and Island Possessions. *Alaska*. Washington, D. C., Gov't Printing Office, 1946.

Illustrated, statistical information on "Opportunities for Individuals," "Opportunities for Investment Capital," and "General Information" concerning Alaska.

U. S. Dept. of the Interior. Territories and Island Possessions. *Annual Reports of the Governor of Alaska to the Secretary of the Interior*. Washington, D. C., Gov't Printing Office, Current Years.

Excellent background material on economic, political and social conditions in Alaska.

United States News 30:18-19, Mar., 30. '50. "Russia's Secret Weakness, Slaves in Siberia."

Millions of Russian slave laborers within easy reach of U. S. planes make Stalin wary of attacking Alaska. Interesting map of labor camps, Army, Navy and air bases is included.

U. S. Territories Office. *Mid-Century Alaska*. Washington, D. C., Gov't Printing Office (1951).

Statistical, illustrated material covering not only the general economic, social and political situation in Alaska, but also employment and business opportunities, maps, scientific information, facts of interest, and special events and celebrations.



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